



**Keynote Address by the President of the Council
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
to the Singapore Airshow Aviation Leadership Summit**

(Singapore, 18 February 2008)

I am delighted to address this opening session of the first Singapore Airshow Aviation Leadership Summit. I would like to congratulate the organizers for having brought together representatives of the vital sectors of the air transport world – airlines, airports, air navigation service providers, manufacturers and regulators. This will make it possible for us to discuss truly global solutions to the incredibly demanding challenges we all face.

I would also wish to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Singapore for its unfailing support of ICAO activities and programmes, particularly in this Region, and to the Representative of Singapore on the Council, Mr. Bong Kim Pin. Mr. Bong has been a driving force behind many global initiatives, most notably the development of a contingency plan to counter the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic of four years ago and the potential threat posed by the spread of the avian flu.

The essence of leadership is the capacity to see things as they are, to take the right decisions at the right time, and to maintain the course until such time as an objective has been reached or a problem solved. Inherent is a capacity to influence others to act in a way that will contribute to meeting challenges head on, relentlessly, for the common good.

Over the next two days, we will have the opportunity to exercise some of these leadership traits, looking at things as they are and developing perhaps new ideas and solutions for dealing with demanding conditions.

It might be fair to say that most of us in this room take growth for granted. After all, there have been only two years without growth in global civil aviation since 1944, and that was because of an armed conflict and the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The latest forecasts of ICAO, IATA and ACI all point to continued and steady increases in the number of passengers worldwide for the next two decades. Certainly in this part of the world, growth is the norm.

In spite of every indication that growth is here to stay, however, we might be wise to take notice of warning signs that loom on the horizon.

The travel experience for millions of travellers is becoming more and more difficult. Overcrowding and long line-ups generate frustration and negative reactions. There is growing congestion not only in airports, but in the skies. Although we are enjoying the safest period in the history of air transport, weaknesses are starting to appear in our processes. Security, also very good at the moment, is always vulnerable to new and emerging threats. And most worrisome of all, air travel in its present form is not sustainable, in spite of the tremendous progress we have made over the past decades in minimizing the impact of aviation on the environment. At the moment, growth means more pollution.

All of this has the potential to stifle growth and reduce the ability of air transport to continue providing enormous economic, social and cultural benefits around the world.

There is another phenomenon which is just beneath the radar, and to which we may not be paying enough attention. It is the fact that humans everywhere are becoming more and more interconnected through information technology and that the trend is expanding at tremendous speed.

Individuals will soon have in the palm of their hands an instrument that will make today's Blackberry or iPhone look like prizes out of a cereal box. A gadget the size of a credit card will replace the personal computer we now have on our desks and will be many times more powerful than some devices we are now just trying to get used to. And they will probably be voice activated.

Then there is the rapid development of video conferencing, which has often been promoted as a viable alternative to air travel. That technology is also advancing quickly. Even today, some systems give the impression of being in the same room as other people half a world away. And there is no limit it seems to the information that will be instantly accessible via the Internet, whether you are part of the majority of the inhabitants of the planet that will live in urban centres or somewhere in the middle of a tropical jungle.

Having said this, I am sure we all think that nothing can replace air travel. Humans are essentially about relationships, whether for business or visiting family and friends. People have always had this insatiable thirst for travelling, for discovering new lands or to return to familiar sights.

Could it be that citizens of a shrinking planet will become much more critical of how air travel is provided in the future? Perhaps because they are so well connected to information, with the ability to consult safety and security records of airlines and countries, identify the most people-friendly airports and operators, and calculate the carbon footprint of their flights. Because of this,

They may insist that air travel be safe wherever they travel;
That air travel is not damaging to their health and well-being;
That air travel again be enjoyable, hassle free and respectful of the human being;
That air travel be sustainable, that it does not contribute to degrading the environment upon which we depend to survive.

They may insist on all of this or may decide not to fly at all.

Perhaps the time has come to think about air travel from a different perspective,

Not simply from the perspective of the regulator,
Or the airlines,
Or the airport,
Or air navigation service providers,
Or any individual stakeholder.

Maybe the time has come to begin thinking about air travel from the perspective of the passenger. Isn't that what we are all about anyway? What would happen if we really focused on making air travel as efficient as possible from the passenger's perspective, getting him or her from point A to point B in the shortest time possible, under the best conditions possible?

Passengers would find their way in airports more easily. Long line-ups at ticket counters, if they exist at all, would be gone. Security checks would proceed much more quickly. Access to aircraft would be simplified. Flights would be more comfortable and enjoyable. There would be fewer instances of unruly passengers. On-time performance would be the norm. Clearance through customs would be streamlined and speedier. And passengers would be on their way home or to the beach, with all of their baggage, and perhaps a smile on their faces.

This would entail optimum efficiency for airlines, airports, air navigation service providers, government and law enforcement agencies, manufacturers, and everyone else involved in providing air transport operations.

Everyone would benefit, it would be a win-win situation. More efficient flight operations would be less time in the air, hence less fuel burn, good for an airline's fuel bill and for the environment. It would mean happier passengers. It would mean less congestion on the ground and in the air. Overall, it could contribute to maintaining growth for years to come.

In one word, we would all become as efficient as possible. This one word, efficiency, sums it all up. Of course, I am not talking about becoming efficient in isolation of other stakeholders. We must all become more efficient in a coordinated, holistic manner. To draw upon the powerful synergy of striving for a common objective.

Increasing the efficiency of air transport also means that ICAO itself has to become more efficient and we are. In 2004, the Organization undertook a major shift in management philosophy and practice, based on the concepts of performance, results, accountability and transparency. In three short years, significant achievements have been made under this new way of doing business, based on the creation of an ICAO Business Plan, which translates each Strategic Objective of the Organization – Safety, Security, Environmental Protection, Efficiency and Continuity of aviation operations and the Rule of Law – into specific Action Plans. These make it possible to utilize resources more effectively as we move to results-based planning and results-based budgeting.

I am convinced that the substantial progress we have made in transforming ICAO into a more integrated, cohesive and productive Organization will allow us to serve our Member States and the world aviation community in a more focussed and timely manner than ever before.

There is something else ICAO must do. The preamble to the Chicago Convention calls on States to establish international air transport services on the basis of equality of opportunity and operated soundly and economically. In other words, we need to foster the creation of a level-playing field for all components of the air transport sector. This is also in the best interest of all stakeholders.

States which are in a position to do so must help developing States and Regions to modernize their civil aviation infrastructure, raise safety and security levels, promote more sustainable operations, develop human resources and foster a spirit of cooperation through global players and regional entities.

We are committed to make this happen, as we are committed to the overall mission of furthering the safe, secure and sustainable development of international civil aviation. This is the essence of the leadership role we have played for more than 60 years and will continue to play as we adapt to changing times and changing circumstances.

Let us build on this legacy. Over the course of this Summit, let us take bold decisions and initiatives that will tell the world we are serious about transforming a global air transport system that reflects the needs and preoccupations of travellers everywhere.